

MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1969

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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

MURDER IS MY ACCOMPLICE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Much of good she had seen . . . a lot more that was evil. She had learned only too well that all things have their price—including Murder. Could Mike Shayne free her from the ticket to hell she carried? One bloody night would tell . . .

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WELCOME TO THE CLUB

Some one in our Party was a traitor. "There's the girl," my chief said. "Or—" He looked at me. I knew what he meant . . .

by Jack Ritchie

COMRADE EDSON stood up, the Sunday newspaper under his arm. "There is the question of security," he said.

"What security?" I asked.

Edson spread the magazine section of the newspaper on the table. "It says here that one-fourth of the members of the Party are in reality F.B.I. agents or informers."

Bernardi clucked his tongue. "Terrible security for the F.B.I. to let something like that leak out."

Edson frowned in his direction. "What I mean, Comrade Bernardi, is what are we going to do about it? After all, we four are the central committee for the Great Lakes

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region and our people will expect some sort of positive action." He cleared his throat. "We've got to initiate something on our own before Headquarters sends somebody out here to do the job for us."

Bridget Standish agreed. "No telling whose head will roll if we leave things to them. But do you have any ideas about how we root out this disloyal twenty-five percent?"

We were all silent for a while. Then I said, "It seems to me that anyone employed by the government to masquerade as a *bona fide* comrade would do his utmost to remain in good standing with the Party. In other words, he would pay his dues promptly."

"Right," Bridget said. "So what we do is check our membership records and when we find anybody who's late with his dues, or delinquent entirely, we know right away that he's a loyal party member."

"Precisely," I said. "That ought to clear about fifty percent of the membership. Unfortunately that still leaves the other fifty percent and half of that may be F.B.I. in one capacity or another."

"Comrades," Bernardi said. "Has it occurred to you that possibly we cannot *afford* to expel so many regular dues-paying members?"

Edson eyed him dubiously. "Comrade Bernardi, are you suggesting that we permit disloyal in-

dividuals to remain in the ranks of our glorious party?"

Bernardi wiped some steam from his glasses. "Well, our financial situation is pretty shaky as it is. Couldn't we just take their dues and sort of neutralize them? I mean we could see to it that they never advanced to any important position in the Party and watch our conversation whenever they're present?"

Edson considered and then rejected that. "No. I'm certain Headquarters would never approve anything so radical."

We fell into silence again.

Bridget Standish finally spoke up. "Whatever we do, we've got to meet our quota."

"Quota?" Bernardi asked. "What quota?"

"It must be obvious that the minimal quota for this purge is twenty-five percent of our membership," Bridget said. "If we expel any less than that, Headquarters will think we're falling down on the job."

I nodded. "And, of course, all of you realize that this purge has to be vertical as well as horizontal?"

Bernardi scratched his head. "What do you mean by that, Comrade Turner?"

I studied him for a few moments. "Comrade Bernardi, how long have you been with the Party?"

"Seven years. Why?"

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"And, of course, you are a loyal and prompt dues payer?"

"Naturally," he said. "Never been late once."

"Ahha!" I said and glanced significantly at the other two members of the central committee.

Bernardi blinked and then color slowly came to his face. "Now look here, Comrade Turner, paying dues promptly could happen to anyone. It's just one of those things."

I laughed shortly. "And this little suggestion that we ought to retain traitors because of our shaky financial condition, wasn't that just a little ploy to protect yourself?"

"Of course not," Bernardi said a trifle desperately. "I just thought that—well—" He brushed sweat from his forehead.

Bridge seemed to feel sorry for him. "Now, Comrade Bernardi, try to look at it this way. Suppose you really *are* loyal to the Party? Suppose we *all* are loyal to the Party. The fact still remains that we have to meet our quota—come what may. So don't you think that as a *loyal* Party member you could cheerfully accept being purged? For the good of the Party and to fill our quota?"

Bernardi closed his eyes.

I told my story to Captain Walters.

"It was a matter of survival, sir," I said. "I had to act swiftly to divert any suspicion from me."

Walters sighed. "I wish you

would not have picked on him."

"Comrade Bernardi seemed the most vulnerable, sir."

Walters studied his folded hands. "The trouble with secrecy is that sometimes it's too secret. For purposes of security, we don't want one finger to know what the other is doing, but at times that can lead to trouble."

"How is that, sir?"

He looked up. "Bernardi's one of our agents. He's been with the Bureau for ten years."

It took me a few moments to digest that. I smiled weakly. "I think we can still salvage the situation, sir. Bernardi hasn't been officially charged by the Party yet. Suppose he and I combine and turn on Edson instead? We ought to be able to make him the goat."

Walters looked out of the window. "No. Not Edson."

I frowned. "You're not going to tell me that—"

Walters nodded. "One of our best informers."

I took a deep breath. "In that case, sir, I suppose the three of us will have to be ungentlemanly and denounce Bridget?"

Walters kept looking out of the window and said nothing.

My voice squeaked. "You don't mean that Bridget is also—"

He nodded again. "We didn't plan things this way, Turner. Each one of you was planted in the party at the bottom and hundreds

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and ankles. He was smiling now.

"After a while I'm going to drive your car over to the other side of Indian Lake, Mel," he said happily. "There's a big sink hole over there, just the right size to make your car disappear forever. With some of Jean's clothes and other things in it, of course. That way, it shouldn't be too hard to make the cops think you and she ran away together, should it?"

He stood back, laughing down at them as they struggled helplessly to free themselves from the tape, their eyes bulging with silent terror.

"But first," he said, "I'm going to take you and my faithful little

wife here over to the far side of the bayou and feed you to the fish." He took a knife from his pocket, snicked it open, and ran his thumb slowly along the edge of the gleaming blade. "Of course, before I drop you folks over the side I just might amuse myself with a little exhibition of plain and fancy carving."

He nodded to himself slowly, put the knife away, and sat down behind the wheel of the cruiser.

"I'm going to enjoy this," he said, grinning back at them as he leaned forward to insert his key in the ignition. "Yes, sir, folks—I'm going to get a real blast out of this."



WELCOME TO THE CLUB by Jack Ritchie

(Concluded from page 118)

of miles apart. But time passed and the simple truth is that our agents and informers are hard workers and get the promotions."

I sighed. "Unfortunately the fact still remains that Party Headquarters will expect a purge on the executive level."

Walters looked at me. "I've been thinking about that very thing, Turner."

I laughed lightly. "Perhaps the Bureau could select the one of us it considers the most expendable and actually sacrifice him for the good of—"

I stopped.

Walters had risen to shake my hand.

Oh, well . . .

At least now my neighbors speak to me.